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Bill Proenza wants less partying and more money for hurricane-watching satellites.

failed, he says, the accuracy of three-day hurricane forecasts would drop by about 16%.

A second version of SeaWinds was launched aboard the Japanese ADEOS-II satellite in 2003, but failed just months later. Another replacement, NASA's Ocean Vector Winds mission, was cancelled early this decade.

In their place, Lautenbacher points to the joint military-civilian Coriolis satellite. It carries an instrument known as WindSat, which

uses a different technique from SeaWinds for detecting wind speeds and direction — rather than bouncing microwaves off the sea surface, it detects emission of microwaves from the surface.

SeaWinds has better spatial resolution than WindSat and works better under weak winds and rainy conditions, says its principal investigator, Timothy Liu of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. But WindSat does some things that SeaWinds cannot — it can provide multiple sets of data simultaneously, counters its lead scientist, Peter Gaiser of the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington DC.

Nevertheless, QuikSCAT is at least five years past the end of its nominal lifespan, and Congress has begun to get worried. Several members of Congress are pressuring NASA and NOAA for more details on what they plan to do when QuikSCAT fails.

Any potential replacement would take time to put together. QuikSCAT itself was hastily pulled together and launched just two years after a previous instrument failed without warning, but only because key parts had already been built for other purposes.

In the meantime, tensions will continue to bubble, although Lautenbacher makes the conflict seem welcome. "You have to remember that Mr Proenza just took over as the head of the hurricane centre, and he is known for being a very strong and forceful advocate for his programmes," he says. "And that's one of the reasons why we love him."

Alexandra Witze

See also the News Feature on page 522.

3 GOOD REASONS

Why science did well at this year's Chelsea Flower Show

1 Gold-medal-winning garden '600 Days with Bradstone' (pictured) was designed as a relaxation area — for a lonely astronaut on Mars.

2 A garden created in tribute to Linnaeus on the 300th anniversary of the naturalist's birth also scooped a gold.

3 And another gold medal went to an exhibit of plants with eco-industrial uses, including marigolds for paint, hemp for textiles — and, bizarrely, a lavender-oil fountain.



M. WALTER/TROIKA

SCORECARD

Everest's telecoms
British mountaineer Rod Baber has made the first mobile telephone call from the world's highest peak.

US television
Bloggers have panned CBS's forthcoming sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. The highly original premise features two stereotypical physicists fumbling to impress their sexy new neighbour.

NUMBER CRUNCH

300 kilometres per hour is the top speed of Japan's new fleet of iconic bullet trains — the same top speed as the old ones.

19% is the energy saving promised by the new trains, which will run on far less electricity than their predecessors.

15 centimetres is the width of the arm-rests in first class, proving that going green doesn't always mean skimping on comfort.

Sources: Royal Horticultural Society, AFP, BBC, scienceblogs.com

SIDELINES

EUROPEAN RANKINGS: ONE WAY OR ANOTHER				
University	THES ¹	Jiao Tong University ²	Leiden ranking: no. of publications ³	Leiden preferred ranking: field-weighted average impact ⁴
Cambridge	1	1	1	2
Oxford	2	2	3	1
ETH Zurich	6	5	21	3
Lausanne	31	79 (tied with 43 others)	89	4
Leiden	32	22	27	23

ETH, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

¹ <http://tinyurl.com/29w3c8>; ² <http://tinyurl.com/ywhebn>; ³ <http://tinyurl.com/yo2ree>; ⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/2z35rb>

Education Development (CHE) also offers rankings *à la carte* for almost 300 German, Austrian and Swiss universities — users can query its online database by individual discipline, number of publications or student outcomes, for example. With

European Union support, the CHE is expanding the system to cover all Europe. Adams says that more complex systems such as these are better than oversimplified summary tables, which policy-makers tend to take at face value.

The US Commission on the

Future of Higher Education is considering creating a similar public database, which would offer competition to the *U.S. News & World Report*. Bennett says he will work with such groups that use "professional standards of measurement". ■ Declan Butler